
Case Studies of Schools Receiving School Improvement Grants

Findings After the First Year of Implementation

Kerstin Carlson Le Floch

Beatrice Birman

Jennifer O'Day

Steven Hurlburt

Diana Mercado-García

Rose Goff

Karen Manship

Seth Brown

Susan Bowles Theriault

American Institutes for Research

Linda Rosenberg

Megan Hague Angus

Lara Hulse

Mathematica Policy Research

Thomas E. Wei

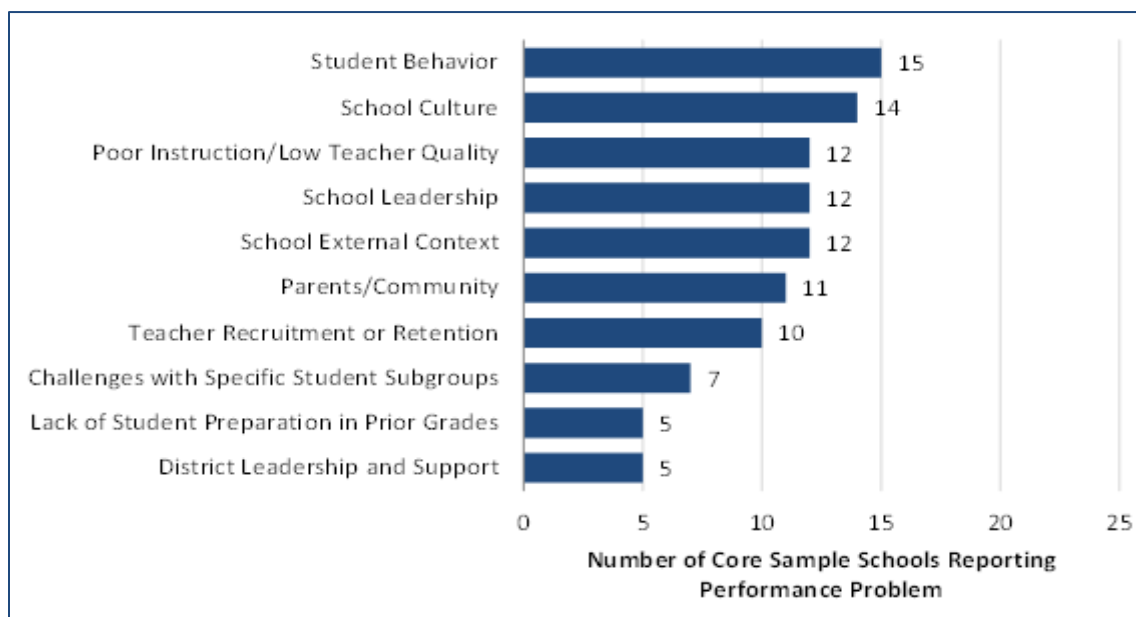
Project Officer

Institute of Education Sciences

for their school's challenges by either addressing the challenges or working to improve the school despite these challenges. Meanwhile, respondents in five schools attributed their performance problems to external factors, such as low levels of parent education or English skills.

Exhibit ES.1.

Performance Problems Reported by Core Sample Schools, 2010–11



Source: SST respondent interviews and focus groups, spring 2011.

Note: Includes 25 core sample schools.

Leadership for Change

Research and policy suggest that schools engaging in change efforts often have principals who have a central role in leading these efforts (Edmonds, 1979; Johnson & Asera, 1999; Picucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002; Rhim, Kowal, Hassel, & Hassel, 2007; Whiteside, 2006). In this sense, principal leadership could potentially be a catalyst for school change, and, if so, a change in the school leader may have symbolic as well as substantive purposes in the turnaround process (Herman et al., 2008). SIG guidance seems consistent with this hypothesis, as SIG schools adopting either the turnaround or the transformation model are required to replace the principal.

Most schools in the core case study sample (21 of 25) reported replacing their principals in either the 2009–10 or 2010–11 school year in accordance with SIG guidelines (one school did so twice). Most principals in core case study schools (21 of 25) had prior experience serving as principals either at their current post or at other schools. They had an average of 5.5 years of experience as principals. Most principals (20 of 25) also had prior experience working in low-performing schools.

When classified on dimensions of leadership (transformational, instructional, and strategic), few principals (2 of 25) placed high and few principals (2 of 25) placed low on all three dimensions. According to teachers, instructional coaches, and members of the school improvement team, the majority of principals (21 of 25) reportedly exhibited a mixture of these qualities. For example, some principals received high scores on one or two dimensions of leadership but middling scores on the others.